

BOOK REVIEW

The great turning

From Empire to Earth Community.

Korten, D. 2006.

Bloomfield. Kumarian Press.

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Korten is the co-founder of the Positive Futures Network. From his well-known people-centred development stable comes eminent works including *Getting to the 21 century. Voluntary action and the global agenda* (1990), *When corporations rule the world* (1995), *The post-corporate world* (1999) and *Globalising civil society* (1998).

In this 22 chapter, 402-page publication, Korten continues previously introduced debates (see references above) on how people-centred (in this case the so-called “Earth Community”) development intervention strategies can transform public bureaucracies into responsive support systems, which strengthen local participation, community control and management. For Korten, following Joanna Macy, the term “the Great Turning” captures the sense of the time we live in and the realisation that the transition between eras follows a more profound historical route than what was previously thought. The publication thus tries to “... provide a historically grounded frame for understanding the possibilities of the unique time in which we live and thereby enable us to envision the path to a new area” (p. 19).

In this regard, for Korten (see title) the construction “Empire” relates to the historical international hierarchy of power, one that is dominated by powerful politicians and international corporations, while “Earth Community” represents the polar opposite – local democratic regimes and human relationships built around partnerships. In working with this rather problematic polar-opposite, Korten argues that there is an opportunity for change. According to the author, these changes can be brought about through paradigm shifts, new metaphors and “new” principles, such as cooperative-organisation, the principle of place, permeable boundaries, abundance and diversity. However, I find it unclear how, “... a framework to help us see more clearly how our seemingly small and fragmented individual efforts can add up to a powerful social force to change the course of history” (p. 313), will transpire in practice.

To enable the above turning(s), a rather bold Korten is of the opinion that the world now has the ability to change the hierarchies of domination and restructure a radically democratic partnership model of organising human relationships. This should be done via a three-levelled approach, i.e. *cultural* value and spiritual fulfilment towards partnerships; *economic* policies that empower those at the bottom; and *political* turning towards a democracy of people. In her book review of Korten's publication, McGregor (*International Journal of Consumer Studies* 31, pp. 664-665, 2007) presents Korten's turning(s) model as follows:

The publication presents a framework of analysis, mostly with an American focus, in which the author weaves together issues of choice (from a dominator towards a partnership model); human consciousness; decision-makers who are out of touch with local realities; the empowering ripple-effect that the citizens of the Earth Community can create through acting as a "community of congruence"; the many and ever-continuing shortcomings of the Empire throughout the history of humankind; the recurring struggle for global justice; the accumulating challenge to the Empire and the Great Turning that should (then) follow when the Earth Community balances power. In presenting this

Table 1: Nuances of the Great Turning envisioned by David Korten

Cultural turning	Economic turning	Political turning
Current <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • values of money and material excess • relationships of domination • belief in our limitations (as self-centred narcissists) • fear our differences 	Current <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • measuring well-being by number of material possessions and monetary wealth • economic policies that raise those at the top, higher • competition for individual advantage • hoarding • rights of ownership 	Current <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • democracy of money • passive citizenship • economic plutocracy (government controlled by wealthy) • redistributive justice • social order by coercion
New direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value of life and spiritual fulfilment • relationships of partnerships • belief in our possibilities • rejoice in our diversity 	New direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • measure well-being by health of self, families, communities and the natural environment • economic policies that raise those at the bottom • economic democracy • sharing • responsibilities of stewardship 	New direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • democracy of people • active citizenship • cooperation for mutual advantage • restorative justice • social order by mutual responsibility and accountability

maze of ideas with an extremely broad brush, in the process probably losing many well-informed readers along a 5,000-year world history journey, Korten uses every possible buzzword in the already confusing development industry. In this regard, with the level of knowledge and research the author has compiled, a more precise, less bold focus could have resulted in a more specific application. The latter would have read easier and somehow could have acted as a “toolbox” for ordinary members of the Earth Community to act out all the well-intended ideals of the author.

For the author to have planned, researched and written this publication must have been a momentous task. The reference list is comprehensive; the text and footnote linkages are expertly done and the quotes with which each chapter starts are quite relevant. The publication is not only aimed at rather sophisticated readers such as academics and development change agents, but politicians, the corporate world and lay people interested in the international development debate. The publication is recommended for Korten followers and those concerned with the international development debate.

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